IN THE CLAIMS:

This listing of claims replaces all prior versions, and listings, of claims in the application:

1 – 10. (Canceled)

11. (CurrentlyAmended) An inertization method for reducing the risk of fire in an enclosed protected area, in which the oxygen content in the protected area is maintained for a defined period at a control concentration (RK) below an operating concentration (BK) by feeding an oxygen-displacing gas from a primary source;

wherein the control concentration (RK) and the operating concentration (BK) are lowered so far below the design concentration (AK) defined for the protected area that the growth curve of the oxygen content reaches a limit concentration (GK) defined for the protected area only in a predefined time when the primary source fails, the margin between the design concentration (AK) and the operating concentration (BK) corresponding to a failure safety margin (ASA), and

wherein the control concentration (RK) corresponds to the limit concentration (GK) less the failure safety margin (ASA) and a safety margin (S), such that the oxygen content in the protected area is reduced to the control concentration (RK) which is so much lower than the limit concentration (GK) that the growth curve of the oxygen content reaches the limit concentration (GK) only after a certain period of time in the event that the primary source fails.

12. (Previously Presented) An inertization method according to claim 11, wherein the failure safety margin (ASA) is determined by taking an air change rate applicable for the protected area, in particular the n_{50} value for the protected area, and/or the pressure differential between the protected area and the surrounding area into consideration.

13. (Canceled)

14. (Previously Presented) An inertization method according to claim 11, wherein

a detector is provided for detecting a fire parameter, and wherein the oxygen content in the protected area is lowered quickly to the control concentration upon detecting an incipient fire or a fire when the oxygen content was previously at a higher level.

15. (Previously Presented) An inertization method according to claim 11, wherein a control range of about ±0.2% by volume oxygen content is provided around the control concentration (RK).

16. (Previously Presented) An inertization method according to claim 11, wherein the oxygen content in the protected area is controlled with respect to the air change rate, in particular the n_{50} value of the protected area, and/or the pressure differential between the protected area and the surrounding area.

17. (Previously Presented) An inertization method according to claim 11, wherein the amount of the extinguishing agent for maintaining the control concentration (RK) in the protected area is calculated with respect to the air change rate of the target area, in particular the n_{50} value of the protected area, and/or the pressure differential between the target area and the surrounding area.

18. (Previously Presented) A device for implementing the method according to one of claims 11, 12 and 14 to 17, wherein the primary source is at least a machine that is designed for producing oxygen-displacing gas, an array of compressed inert gas bottles, a buffer volume or a deoxydation machine.